

HOW'S ABOUT

By JOHN

THE ONLY claim this column may have to fame this week is the fact that it was one of the few not at Loakes Park on Saturday afternoon.

But that does not mean we did not suffer the agonies and joys of that F.A. Cup Third Round clash with First Division Middlesbrough.

A hectic afternoon this switching from B.B.C. 1 to I.T.V. from Radio 2 to Radio Oxford, Radio London and Radio Teesside.

After all the tumult and the shouting of the week before the predictions, the pundits and the prognostications came the prologue from Wanderers manager, Brian Lee, we haven't a hope in hell, with a little more of an optimistic view from chairman Jack Smethurst who was up in the new hospital block, (with gout, said one Sunday newspaper) telling the world all about it (the football) in his best bedside manner.

From the snatched reports and commentaries, one sometimes began to wonder if it was Middlesbrough that the Wanderers were playing and not Middlesbrough.

Did I hear a chant, what a load of rubbish?

Anyway two T.V. and at least three radio channels survived it all and this was a day to savour for a long, long time. The world had its eyes on Wycombe and Wycombe did not fail the world.

Jackie Charlton was 'bloody glad to hear the final whistle'. With 25 minutes to go he did not think that his first division side would make it.

And so to the first replay on Sunday. A bad slip here. Where I am we can only get Midland I.V. and I could have been stuck with the Wolves and Ipswich. But crafty use of a match-stick amidst the television controls enabled me to get Loakes Park in a snow storm. But even in that blizzard there was no mistaking who was the better team.

Wycombe only made one mistake. If they had sited a goalpost six inches the other way skipper Phillips' header would have gone home and the Cup holders a Wembley but one ago, Sunderland, would have been here soon.

Never mind, they still might make it after tonight's replay at Ayresome Park.

And when they had finished on Saturday one could not help but admire the magnanimity of Middlesbrough's boss, Jack Charlton (mind you he had every reason to be magnanimous, for this was the escape of his life). I bet he wasn't as magnanimous when he got his own side back into the team bus.

Of course Fleet Street came out to the wilds of Bucks and found the slope of Loakes Park getting steeper all the time. Even in this day and age anywhere north of South Ruislip still seems to be Indian territory.

I liked the bit about the locals descending the one in ten hill into the town asking where the football ground was.

Said another, the town was full of carnival atmosphere. Well, it always is. It's being so cheerful that

keeps us going. And we all know that its High Wycombe down in the valley and Downley up on the hill.

And even the hard-hearted policemen smiled after the match.

We also had the gent who took a side on picture of the stand making it look like a corrugated iron loo. Local colour that. He should have taken the Octagon and said it was the ticket office.

So far I have scanned a few more editions and cannot find any reports of any missionaries being eaten alive.

But all in all, give and take a few extra shots a few feet up or down on that slope there were many all clever stuff no rubbish magnanimous summings up of a match that did credit to the Wanderers and to the sportsmanship of both sides.

Having got Jack Charlton off the rack and the crowd out of the dressing room we'll move over to the hospital ward for a final summing up from chairman Jack Smethurst.

On this day he had no doubts that amateur football had far more too it than the pro stuff.

And would he be out of hospital in time to go to Middlesbrough for the replay?

"Oh no," said Jack. "They keep carrying out tests on me. They've tested me for everything but pregnancy".

Quite understandable, Mr. Chairman. We would have thought that it was Jackie Charlton who was having the baby on Saturday.